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# homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, April 5, 1944.

Subject: "STORAGE OF HOUSEHOLD FURNISHINGS." Information from Textile scientists and entomologists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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In many of our up-to-date, modern homes, the change from winter weather to balmy spring days doesn't always bring with it that old-fashioned frenzy of house-cleaning. But most people do have to exchange some of the thick heavy winter furnishings for lighter weight draperies, rugs, and so on. They get out slip covers and make other preparations for summer living. Or they close the winter house for the summer months, and put away sheets and table linens as well as other fabric furnishings.

The chief problem is the best way to store all these things. You want to protect rugs and upholstered furniture---in fact, anything made of wool or part wool---from moths and carpet beetles, just as you do wool or fur clothing. And keep silver fish away from rayons, linens, and cottons containing starch or sizing. Then, in addition to protection from insects, your stored possessions will keep best if shielded from dust, light, high temperatures, dampness, and lack of ventilation.

So for good storage, textile scientists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommend that if possible you use a large closet or a room in some part of the house where the temperature is about the same as in the rooms you use all the time---neither too hot nor too cold. You should be able to ventilate this storage place from time to time, yet keep it tight shut, dry and darkened. A good storage place of this kind will have shelves for sealed packages containing clothes and blankets and other articles likely to be attacked by insects, and space on the floor for trunks or boxes containing other stored things.

A hot attic isn't the best place for storing fabrics. Neither is the basement. The attic is generally too hot, and the basement may be damp. Not long ago the tex

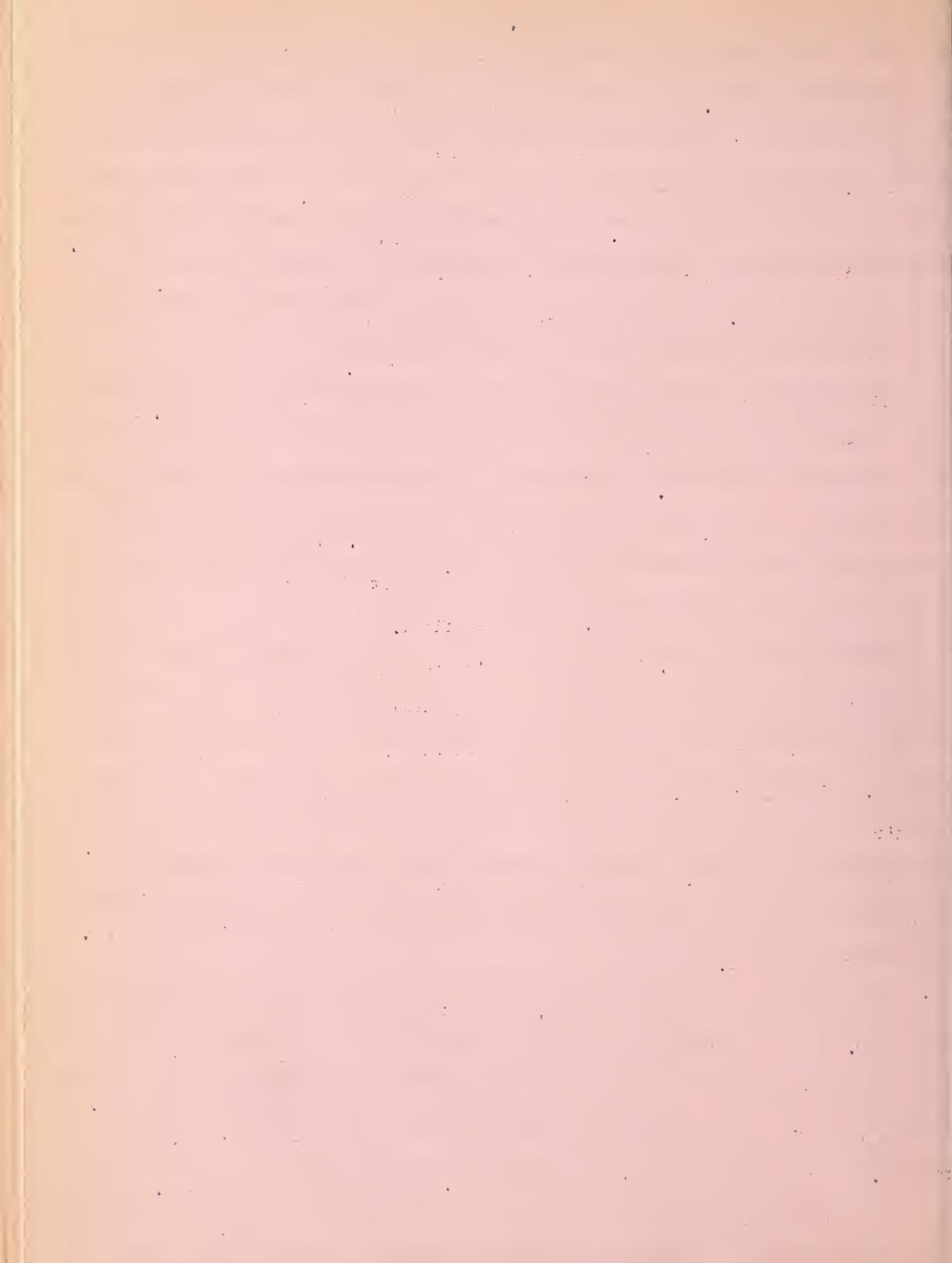


textile specialists finished a four-year study of the effect of different kinds of storage on different fabrics. They tested both new and washed cotton and linen sheets and wool materials. When they kept cotton and wool at attic temperature of about 102 degrees, both were weaker at the end of the four-year test. Both white cotton and white linen had turned yellow. This indicated a chemical change in these fabrics. Linen did not suffer as much damage from the attic heat as cotton and wool did, but it was slightly weaker. New sized sheets suffered more damage during storage than sheets that had been washed so that the sizing was removed.

Fabrics stored in the dark suffered less than those stored in the light. Light makes fabrics break down chemically and become weaker. Light did more damage to linen than attic temperatures. The study also showed that it is a good idea to wrap those washable fabric articles in old sheeting for storing, or put them in tightly closed trunks or boxes to protect them from light. If you have to store sheets or anything containing starch or sizing, launder it first.

Perhaps you are thinking, "Well, if I can't store my curtains and linen in the attic, why won't the basement do?" The textile specialists explain that even if the basement is dry most of the time, it may show traces of dampness on rainy or muggy days. If you have ever found mildew on anything you have left in the basement you're pretty sure to have mildew on articles stored down there, even in trunks. The combination of dampness, darkness, summer weather and lack of ventilation is just right for mildew. And once the mildew fungus grows into the fibers of a fabric, you can never get it out.

Let's go back to the ideal storeroom, which will preferably be on the first or second floor. You'll want this place to be large enough to take care of your wool rugs as well as clothing and blankets, to protect them from moths and carpet beetles. Put briefly, the way to protect anything from moth damage is to clean the articles thoroughly, and then keep moths from reaching them, to lay eggs on the fabric. You do this by wrapping the articles so tightly no parent moths can get inside the package. You can make the articles still safer by enclosing flakes or moth balls with



them.

If you have to put away winter rugs, have them cleaned or clean them well yourself. Then scatter naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene flakes liberally over the surface. Roll large rugs up on long poles, shorter ones together. Tie each bundle in several places and cover with stout paper, sealing every crevice with gummed paper tape. In this way the fumes are held in the package so that any clothes moth larvae are forced to breathe the strong fumes that will kill them.

The silverfish is another household insect that may eat stored cottons, linens or other fabrics containing starch or sizing. It also goes for bookbindings. To protect any of these things in storage from silverfish put them in tight packages or boxes in a dry, cool storeroom, wrapped just as you do woolens, with all openings sealed.

Speaking of insect damage---when you put slip covers on upholstered furniture for the summer, you protect the pieces from dust, but not from moths. Unless a fabric is one moths do not attack, like rayon, cotton, linen or silk, or a mixture of some of these, or unless you have had the fabric treated to make it moth-proof, the slip cover may actually hide and shelter moth larvae and they may do a great deal of damage before you discover it. Brush and clean the upholstery well before you cover the furniture. Then from time to time take the covers off and dust and brush the fabric well, or go over it with a vacuum cleaner. If you find clothes moth or carpet beetle damage, you had best send the infested pieces to a reliable firm to be fumigated.

